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ABSTRACT

The Portfolio Process, piloted by the University of West Florida and recently mandated by the Florida State Board of Education as the central element of the Florida Beginning Teacher Program, is a model for professional development of teaching competence. The portfolio is both a product and a process. As a product, the portfolio is a personalized compilation of information from multiple sources. Each piece of data included is placed in the notebook as a means of representing the individual's teaching competency and/or work toward increasing competency. The portfolio as a process includes three stages within a given cycle: (1) collection of data to support teaching competence; (2) review and analysis of data by a support team; and (3) commitment to a plan of action by the teacher. During the data collection stage of the process, each participant analyzes his own strengths and needs in each competency area, makes decisions concerning where and how the work begins, and collects data from various sources. During the second stage, the teacher presents evidence of competence to a support team who, in conferences with the teacher, reviews and analyzes the data. The final stage involves the teacher and support team agreeing on a plan of action for the teacher. This three-stage process is repeated until the desired level of competence is reached. (JM)

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THE PORTFOLIO PROCESS: NEW ROLES FOR MEETING CHALLENGES IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

a presentation
at the

63rd Annual Conference
of
Association of Teacher Educators

by

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INTRODUCTION

More than a decade ago reports of competency based teacher education programs began to be regularly reported in the literature. Massive amounts of time, effort and resources were devoted to the task of specifying competencies, developing modules of study and revamping the format of many teacher education programs. This approach to the study of teaching was accepted by many teacher educators as the newest way to train teachers.

Although a number of problems were encountered in the development of competency based teacher training programs, two basic ideas which appear to have merit for teacher education in the 1980's have survived: 1) teacher preparation must be based on criteria that set forth the best that we know about teaching and learning, and 2) teacher competence must be viewed through the conceptual reality of classroom performance.

We believe that the Portfolio which has been piloted by The University of West Florida provides a model for professional development of teaching competence while avoiding some of the problems encountered by many competency based programs. We believe too, that this model restores teacher education to a dynamic, interactive activity as recommended by Hall and Houston (1981).

The Portfolio Approach herein described:

- Utilizes selected competencies as the organizing principles of the process
- Focuses specifically on elements of competencies without isolation or fragmentation of parts from significant wholes.

- Provides organizational structures which guide the dynamic interactive process of portfolio development and the portfolio product.
- Utilizes the reality base of actual classroom interaction as a primary testing ground for teacher competence.
- Involves the preservice and the inservice teacher in professional discussion of the meaning and significance of competency statements with professionals.
- Places the teacher in the central role of self evaluation, planner and documenter of personal competence.

BACKGROUND OF THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH

As early as 1972, the Early Childhood Faculty at The University of West Florida began to explore the nature of specific teaching competencies and the processes involved in the acquisition and documentation of competence within a year-long internship for preservice teachers. The field testing of the processes which evolved into the Portfolio Approach was cooperatively undertaken with a local school district. At that early time, the portfolio was known as a "Log". The log was a compilation of student observations and plans for work with children and was organized around five competency statements.

The Portfolio Approach was tested further when it became a major element of an inservice certification program designed to meet educational needs addressed in the 1975 Public Education Act in the State of Florida. The task of designing the inservice certification program was undertaken by a consortium which represented Northwest Florida's educational institutions, public and private, concerned with the education of young children. A set of ten competency statements was developed and utilized in this inservice program. Since the Fall of 1977 approximately eighty classroom teachers have utilized the Portfolio Approach as a means of adding early childhood certification to elementary education credentials. The Portfolio Approach became a part of the early childhood preservice program at about the same time as the inservice certification program was undertaken.

These early experiences with the Portfolio Approach to professional development led to the inclusion of the portfolio in a piloted revision of the training program for preservice elementary teachers at The University of West Florida. This pilot program conducted during 1980-81 was collaboratively designed and implemented with a local school district.

In September 1981 the Portfolio Approach became a major element of the preservice training program for all elementary and early childhood students at The University of West Florida. This training approach was characterized by the use of: (1) a collection of specifically stated competencies, (2) a support team, and (3) the portfolio.

During the 1970's and the early 1980's the State of Florida continued to move forward on two fronts which impacted on public school education programs (K-12) and teacher education programs. The State Board of Education made a commitment that: (1) on a statewide average, educational achievement in the State of Florida will equal that of the upper quartile of states within five years, as indicated by commonly accepted criteria of attainment (Turlington, 1981), and (2) preparation of all teachers who received regular Florida certification shall demonstrate proficiency in selected essential/generic competencies.

Two specific actions within the State have served to place the Portfolio Approach in a position of prominence as a model for the reconstruction of teacher education as a dynamic, interactive activity. One of these actions was a legislative one.

The legislative action, Florida CSSB 338 entitled Teacher Certification/Supervised Teaching (Chapter 81-243) added a provision, effective July 1, 1982, requiring successful completion of one year of supervised teaching. The second action was taken by the Florida State Board of Education in establishing rules for the implementation of the legislation incorporating the Portfolio Approach as a central element of the Florida Beginning Teacher Program. The description of the Portfolio Approach drawn up by the Department of Education paralleled, in many ways, the approach which had been developed at The University of West Florida.

THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH

The Portfolio Approach has proven to be a useful tool for facilitating professional development of both pre- and inservice teachers. Strengths of the approach, as implemented at The University of West Florida include the following:

1. provides a personalized approach to professional growth,
2. allows a focus on growth needs in a positive, non-punitive manner,
3. employs processes which can be independently utilized by an individual teacher,
4. uses a practical strategy which has provided for a continuous recycling as needed or desired,
5. requires the individual teacher to take a principal role in decision-making, and
6. establishes the classroom as the ongoing laboratory for teaching training.

The Portfolio

The portfolio is both a product and a process. As a product, the portfolio is a personalized compilation of information from multiple sources. Each piece of data included in the portfolio is placed there as a means of representing the individual's teaching competency and/or work toward increasing competency. The basic element of the portfolio as we have developed it is a three-ringed notebook. Materials which cannot be organized readily into the notebook format may be housed in expanding files or file folders. Since the portfolio is a very personalized product, no two look alike. Although we propose a format which is being utilized by the faculty of Elementary and Secondary Education, the internal organization of the portfolio is adaptable to individual preferences.

The portfolio as a process includes three stages within a given cycle:

1. the collection of data to support teaching competence,
2. the review and analysis of the data by a support team, and
3. the commitment to a plan of action by the teacher.

Data Collection Stage

During this stage of the Portfolio process each participant analyzes his/her own strengths and needs in each competency area. The individual makes decisions concerning where and how his/her work begins based on estimates of personal needs. It is assumed that:

- individuals will have differing beginning points, and
- growth rates will vary.

The teacher collects baseline data for the initiation of the portfolio process. The collection includes many sources of input. Writings, including statements regarding personal philosphy, educational understandings, self administered assessment data provide examples of types of data which may be included. Other forms of evidence which the teacher would collect are:

children's work,
audio and video tapes,
photographs, and,
perceptions of others concerning aspects of the teacher's work.

It is also recommended that the portfolio include a series of self observations over a period of time on selected aspects of one's own teaching.

Review and Analysis of the Data Stage

The second stage of the process of portfolio development is the conferencing of the teacher with a Support Team. During the conferencing the teacher presents evidence of competence to the Support Team. Questions may be raised by support team members concerning any aspect of the data presented. In working with the data, the participants look for congruence, as well as diversity in the interpretation of the data. The central question to be considered in reviewing and analyzing the data is how do these data cluster in relation to the competencies. The function of the support team is to introduce a reality base into the teacher's thinking concerning his/her own performance. Questioning, probing, and taking other points-of-view help the teacher to percieve his/her acts of teaching in a fuller sense.

Commitment to a Plan of Action Stage

Projections for the teacher's future efforts in self improvement are based on the questions raised and answered in stage two. Compromise between the teacher and the members of the support team will be necessary in the determination of specific plans of action to be undertaken by the teacher. Projections for action for further professional development must be related to the data presented and to desired competencies under consideration. A commitment to action may necessitate study on the part of the teacher, may require assistance of the support team, or may include a broad range of other specific activities. This commitment to action requires, most of all, that the teacher set in motion the kinds of agreed upon activities that are mutually perceived as growth-producing opportunities.

This portfolio process continues to cycle through these three stages until the judgment of the support team is that the teacher has met the desired level of performance in each competency area.

ROLES OF A SUPPORT STAFF IN THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH

The conceptualization of the support team membership in The University of West Florida's development of the Portfolio Approach provided for varying compositions depending upon whether the teacher was a preservice teacher or a inservice teacher. For the preservice teacher the support team consisted of the preservice teacher, all university instructors with whom the teacher was working in any semester of courses, and the field-site classroom inservice teacher with whom the teacher was working. The support team for an inservice teacher consisted of the inservice teacher, a peer teacher selected by the inservice teacher, the building level principal, a district level supervisor, a university early childhood instructor, and an "other" as desired. (In two cases, a parent was selected as a member of a support team.)

The Support Staff as constituted in the Florida Beginning Teacher Program calls for the involvement of a peer teacher, a building level administrator and an "other professional educator" who may include, but is not limited to, teacher education center directors, staff development specialists, curriculum directors, instructional supervisors, coordinators or specialists, and college or university educators.

Members of the Support Team assisting the teacher in acquiring and in documenting teaching competence act both as individuals and as a team.

As individuals they engage in actions including:

- counseling/advising
- consulting/conferencing
- observing/participating
- collecting/gathering

Our experiences in the development of the Portfolio Approach have indicated that support team members must learn how to work individually and collectively in helping a teacher to develop competence. The Florida Beginning Teacher Program recognizes this necessity and mandates that Support Staff members engage in inservice activities which prepare them for the task of serving on a support team.

As a group, Support Staff members in the Florida Beginning Teacher Program engage in decision-making related to the review and analysis of data presented to verify competence. These tasks are continuously in progress as the individual teacher proceeds through the three stages of the portfolio process. In the data collection stage the Support Staff will assist in making decisions such as: "What data could be collected which would best illustrate competence?", "Will these data provide sufficient evidence?" and "How else could competence be documented?" In the review and analysis stage decisions such as "What competence does these data document?", "What pieces of data illustrate competence?" would have to be considered.

Roles of the Support Staff in the commitment to a plan-of-action state are evident. These decisions are based on the 'whole' of the teacher's development when viewed in relation to specific competencies, and consider the questions of "What tasks must be accomplished?", "Who will undertake agreed upon tasks?", and "Within what time frame will the tasks be completed?"

In the case of The Florida Beginning Teacher Program the formative judgments of the Support Staff will provide the basis on which the building administrator makes decisions relative to exit of the program and certification.

Florida's efforts to assure that every teacher possesses minimal competence suffers from two conflicting realities. One is the concern that minimal competence should mean the same for all people; and two, minimal competence must be situationally determined. Efforts are being expended to define statewide minimal levels of competence, but efforts

must also be expended to enhance the Support Staff's skill in making individual and collective judgments. A more significant question which must be addressed in relation to Florida's bid for quality education is "Will evidence of minimal performances by teachers result in quality education?"

SUMMARY

The Portfolio Approach which has been piloted at The University of West Florida, and which has been mandated in the Florida Beginning Teacher Program has the potential to lift professional sights beyond competency approaches where stress is on isolated and fragmented competency concerns. We believe this model recognizes and implements the best of formative and the best of summative evaluation in the competent teacher issue. The approach embraces the truths that development and competence are individual matters and that development and competence are enhanced and extended through manageable support systems.